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SUBJECT: MORE COMMENTATORS QUESTION AKP FOREIGN POLICY

11. (SBU) Among Turkish media commentators and academics, we are observing an increasing tendency to question the Erdogan/Davutoglu foreign policy's perceived goal of reorienting Turkey away from the West towards positions and a vernacular that appeal to the "Islamic street." Riza Turmen, a former European Court of Human Rights judge and respected columnist, wrote in the November 6 edition of "Milliyet" that Turkey's allies are beginning to perceive its divergence from Western policy positions and institutions. He attributes this divergence to a foreign policy populism that seeks to draw energy from religious emotion. He warns that a foreign policy based on emotion, rather than sober calculation of national self-interest, risks introducing inconsistencies into Turkey's positions that will quickly reduce its influence on the international stage. President Gul's recent admonition to Iran that it be fully transparent to the IAEA and senior Turkish bureaucrats' privately expressed regret over the shabby treatment of the Israeli ambassador during his recent tour of northeastern Turkey may be part of gathering reaction to the excessive influence of populism on recent Turkish foreign policy formulation.

12. (U) Begin text of Embassy translation of Riza Turmen's November 6 "Milliyet" column:

Turkey's Choice

The November/December edition of "Foreign Affairs" magazine included an article on developments in Turkish foreign policy under the title "Turkey's Transformers". The article is especially noteworthy as it is written by Morton Abromowitz and Henri Barkey, two prominent foreign policy experts who are familiar with Turkey.

The article impartially reviews Turkish foreign policy. It is critical of certain aspects of that foreign policy and finds other aspects praiseworthy. It is useful because it shows us the outsider's perspective at a time when foreign policy populism is on the rise. The article puts forward the question: "Do leaders of Turkey want to play the role of genuine policy implementers in global politics or do they want to play the role of representatives of Islamic culture?"

I think here lies the basic thrust of assessments of Turkish foreign policy. Turkish foreign policy has recently been very active. However, upon closer observation, ideological reasons for this activity become apparent. Religion always creates an energy. Turkish foreign policy has new energy, but, as long as the source of such energy is religious belief, one wonders how consistent its consequences can be. Consistency is, after all, the yardstick for success in foreign policy.

Inconsistency in Foreign Policy

Several inconsistencies are noticeable today in Turkish foreign policy.

Moral inconsistencies: Turkey is critical of Israel on moral grounds because of its actions in Gaza. Turkey is correct in making these criticisms. But you do not see Turkey taking the same stance towards Sudan for its crimes against humanity in Darfur. The government is a major supporter of Sudan, let alone condemning it. The government again keeps silent in the face of crimes committed by Hamas against humanity.

Legal inconsistencies: The incidents in China where Uighurs have been killed have been described by the government as "genocide." Meanwhile, Turkey has been trying to explain to the world why the events of 1915 should not be defined as genocide. One should not use the term "genocide" lightly.

Political imbalances: Turkey tried to act as an intermediary between Russia and Georgia during the war between the two states. However, Sarkozy had already brokered a ceasefire. Turkey's attempts were futile in the end because of its lack of coordination with the West. Turkey's proposal for a Peace and Cooperation Pact in the Caucasus was never realized.

One can't say that Turkey seeks balance among the Arabs in the Middle East. While remaining aloof from pro-Western countries like Egypt and Tunisia, it has close ties with anti-West countries like Qatar and Sudan.

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Another example for Turkey's inconsistent foreign policy is to recognize Hamas as the legal representative of the Palestine people, while viewing Mahmud Abbas, recognized by many states as the president of Palestine, as the leader of an illegal government.

A State Outside the Western Alliance

There is no visible change in Turkey's relations with the West. But, the problem is Turkey doesn't behave like a member of the Western Alliance. Other than talking with the U.S. about security issues, Turkey doesn't have a foreign policy dialog with Western countries. Islamic sensitivity in Turkey exceeds its former regard for the Western democracies. This attitude doesn't make Turkey more independent; it only estranges Turkey from the Western Alliance.

Combined with the mistakes the West makes concerning Turkey, this creates a vicious circle, which affects Turkey's ties to the West. Turkey will gradually slip away from the West. It will be wrong to consider foreign policy independent from domestic policy. In an environment where the majority doesn't want Jewish or Christian neighbors, it is not surprising to see the priorities of Turkish foreign policy slipping towards the Islamic states. During the AKP administration, there has been a transformation of Turkey's foreign policy that tracks the public opinion.

What kind of Turkey do we want to see? A secular, democratic and modern Turkey, integrated with the West or a Middle Eastern state where public life is organized according to authoritarian religious rules and everything depends on what the leader says? It is necessary to make a choice. I wonder if the choice has already been made.

End text.

JEFFREY